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ABSTRACT

This report examining the status of science fiction in libraries during the 30-year period of the genre's infancy discusses past attitudes toward science fiction and policies concerning its selection and acquisition. In order to determine how strong an influence reviews would have been on the purchase of science fiction, the book announcements and reviews were surveyed in four selection tools: the American Library Association catalog, Booklist, Library Journal, and Publisher's Weekly. The announcements and reviews were checked on two levels: how many books from Anatomy of Wonder, a selective bibliography of science fiction books, were included in the four tools; and what was said about each book. A literature search was also conducted to discover what librarians were actually saying about science fiction. Tables display the data gathered and a bibliography is provided. (FM)

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Kathryn Sullivan

FIRST CONTACT:
SCIENCE FICTION IN THE LIBRARY
1920 - 1949

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In recent years, science fiction has begun a period of serious self-examination. The self-congratulatory remarks have all but vanished. Instead, new words have crept into SF vocabulary, words like "ghetto mentality"[1] and "we precious few syndrome"[2], used most commonly to explain SF readers' mistrust of nonSF readers.

The development of the "we precious few syndrome" among science fiction people—both readers and writers—is not difficult to understand when the development of the genre is also examined. Ben Bova blamed SF people's defensiveness on the field's early years.

> "Since the lurid covers of magazines perpetuated the image in the 30's, detractors of the genre have called it pulp literature. Its critics have judged the books by their covers. Silly movies and the haughty sniff of an occasional literary critic confirmed their opinion."[3]

Some critics did more than sniff at the newly emerging field. For example, one literary critic of 1939 had this to say after describing a few plots of the then current science fiction:

> "This besotted nonsense is from the group of magazines known as the science pulps, which deal with both the World and the Universe of To-morrow and, as our items show, take no pleasure in either. The fact that they do not seems more significant than any other turned up by the Easy Chair's recent course of reading in them, which began as a mild literary inquiry. These stories are more maturely written than those in the cowboy pulps, for example, in only that they use longer words and more involved sentences. Their conventions and narrative formulas are also less primitive than the

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[1] James Gunn, Analog, November, 1974: 5.

[2] Neil Barron, Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1976): xx.

[3] Ben Bova, "From Mad Professors to Brilliant Scientists: The Evolution of a Genre," Library Journal 98 (May 15, 1973): 1646.

> chase-with-six-shooters of the horse opera. Some of them are, to be sure, just that chase rephrased in terms of death rays, with heroic earthmen overcoming malign Venusians on the last page, but the majority of them forgo melodrama in favor of exegesis."[4]

After criticism like that the appearance of a "we precious few" syndrome becomes somewhat easier to understand. SF people had good reason to be defensive in the 1930's and 40's. Yet, even now, rumblings can still be heard from that field of fiction.

> "For generations, librarians and teachers have felt uncomfortable about science fiction."[5]

> "We asked children's librarians for SF and they said 'Oh, we do not allow children to read escapist literature.' We asked adults' librarians for it and they said 'Oh, we do not carry children's books on this side of the building.'"[6]

> "And, twenty-five years ago, nobody gave a damn about pure quill sf. Libraries excluded it."[7]

Those librarians who are also SF fans tend to wince at such statements. What did their predecessors do to deserve such scorn? Did librarians actually exclude SF altogether from their collections? Such action would have been against even the earliest Library's Bill of Rights, first adopted by the American Library Association in 1939.

> "I. Books and other reading matter selected for purchase from the public funds should be chosen because of value and interest to people of the

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[4]Bernard DeVoto, "Doom Beyond Jupiter," Harper 179 (September 1939): 446.

[5]Ben Bova, "From Mad Professors to Brilliant Scientists: The Evolution of a Genre," Library Journal 98 (May 15, 1973): 1646.

[6]Ursula K. LeGuin, The Language of the Night (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979): 225.

[7]Alexei and Cory Panshin, "The End of the Ghetto?" Galileo #5 (October 1977): 15.

> community, and in no case should the selection be influenced by the race or nationality or the political or religious views of the writers."[8]

As the ALA did not force individual librarians or library boards to accept this policy of selection, there may have been some which did not. But would the actions of a few libraries bring such criticism against all libraries? What, then, would help to turn SF people against libraries? Did inflamatory statements against SF appear in library journals? Or did the library profession as a whole completely ignore the emerging field of science fiction?

The fact that these questions remained unanswered prompted this report. During a literature search of this subject, many articles on the development of science fiction were discovered, but none at all on the attitudes of specific groups outside the field toward science fiction. Occasionally in an article a SF writer like Ben Bova would mention that librarians felt "uncomfortable" about science fiction, but it was never explained what had given him that impression of the library profession's attitude.

If librarians did not exclude science fiction, what, then, would they have done with SF books? A clue might be found in Article I of the 1939 Library's Bill of Rights. At that time, books were selected not only because of library patrons' interests, but also because a particular book would be of value to the community, such as nonfiction, classics, and the so-called "serious" literature.

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[8]Judith H. Krug, "A History of the Library Bill of Rights," American Libraries 3 (January 1972): 81.

If librarians were trying to interest their patrons in "serious" literature, and because science fiction did have the "pulp literature" stamp on it from its magazine beginnings in 1926, it would follow that librarians would not strongly endorse science fiction. If that was the case, most librarians would then have treated SF the same as westerns, mysteries, romances, etc.—which is to say that the interests of the clientale of the particular library would determine how much of the particular branch of fiction would be stocked.

II. LIMITING FACTOR

It would be almost impossible at the present time to conduct a nationwide survey of libraries to see how SF was treated in each from science fiction's early years to now. An easier method would be to survey the selection tools used by most libraries.

Ben Bova wrote, "Years ago, librarians bought science fiction books on the strength of reviews or because a publisher had established a science fiction line for which libraries could place standing orders."[9] For those librarians whose reading interests were in other fields of fiction, reviews would be the only way to select books—whether SF, westerns, or anything else.

As an attempt to uncover how strong an influence reviews would be on the purchase of SF by libraries, this report will focus on the new book announcements and book reviews of four authorities in the library world of book buying. The first major authority is the American Library Association Catalog, which for about 37 years recommended books for

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[9]Ben Bova, "From Mad Professors to Brilliant Scientists: The Evolution of a Genre," Library Journal 98 (May 15, 1973): 1646.

inclusion in library collections. The other three authorities are journals—Booklist, Library Journal, and Publisher's Weekly. The last journal is more for publishers and book sellers, but it is often used for library acquisitions as well.

To attempt to correspond with Ben Bova's "years ago" mentioned above, the time period for the survey will be from 1920 to 1949. This time period was decided upon for two main reasons. For one, although science fiction has been written since the second century A. D., when Lucian wrote his True History, the term, "science fiction", was only coined about 1929.[10] H. G. Wells, in the 1890's, called his works in the field "fantastic and imaginative romances."[11] Other terms, culled from Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature and Cumulative Book Review Digest, and existing in their pages from about 1920 on up to about 1954, are "Pseudo-scientific Novels", "Science in Fiction", "Science in Literature", "Utopian Romance", "Prophetic Novels", "Novels of the Future", and "Interplanetary Novels". One not familiar with the genre would be hard put to recognize all these as belonging to the same field, much less trying to find books listed under the different indexing terms.

The second reason this time period was chosen was because of three important dates in science fiction history. The first, 1926, was the year in which Hugo Gernsback published Amazing Stories, the

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[10]James Blish, "The Tale That Wags the God: The Function of Science Fiction," American Libraries 1 (December 1970): 1029.

[11]Ibid.

world's first science fiction magazine.[12] This was actually a continuation of the pulp literature label for science fiction, not the beginning. Science fiction stories had appeared in many other magazines long before Amazing Stories appeared[13], but this was the first magazine devoted entirely to science fiction.

The second date, 1938, was the year in which John W. Campbell, Jr., became editor of the SF magazine Astounding Stories. As Isaac Asimov explained it,

> "The Golden Age [of science fiction] began in 1938, when John Campbell became editor of Astounding Stories and remolded it, and the whole field, into something closer to his heart's desire. During the Golden Age, he and the magazine he edited so dominated science fiction that to read Astounding was to know the field entire."[14]

Campbell not only remolded the field, but he discovered and trained new writers—such as Asimov, de Camp, Heinlein, Sturgeon, and Van Vogt—and also influenced the writing of established authors in the field.[15] As Lester del Rey put it, "Without him, the current acceptance of science fiction would almost certainly have been impossible."[16]

The last important date, 1950, is the year in which the Library of Congress first began to use the term "science fiction" as a fiction

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ivor A. Rogers, "The Gernsback Era, 1926-1937." In Neil Barron, Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976): 81.

[14] Isaac Asimov, Before the Golden Age: A Science Fiction Anthology of the 1930's (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974): xiii.

[15] Lester del Rey, The Best of John W. Campbell (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976): 4-5.

[16] Ibid: 5.

classification subject heading. It is a significant date because it marks the recognition of the genre by an organization outside of the field. The survey will end in 1949, however, so as to see the treatment of SF before it was acknowledged as a distinct field of literature.

III. DOORWAY INTO TIME

To simplify the search for SF books of the time period, Neil Barron's Anatomy of Wonder, a selective bibliography of science fiction from the 16th century to 1974, was used to provide a list of SF books for the study. Anatomy of Wonder's list of books was also useful because it distinguished between books necessary for a core collection of science fiction and books which were less important.

> "Starred titles [core collection] were selected on the basis of one or more of these characteristics: awards or nominations received...; influence of the work; outstanding or unique treatment of a theme; critical and/or popular acceptance; importance of the work in the author's total output; or historical importance, especially for early works.
>
> "Nonstarred titles are those which are relatively less important but which should be found in a more comprehensive collection. This category includes many of the less distinguished but still respectable efforts in the field. It necessarily reflects substantial personal judgment by individual contributors, and no attempt was made to secure unanimity of judgment. Certain titles were selected as representative of their type, e.g., space opera. Equally good alternates could have been selected."[17]

Each book listed in Anatomy of Wonder which appeared in the new book announcements or book reviews of one or more of the four

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[17]Neil Barron, Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976): xi.

sources was counted. Also, since Anatomy of Wonder's list went back to the 16th century, books from pre1920 mentioned in the reprints section of the four sources could be counted and compared with reprints of post1920 books, as an indication of whether or not librarians were paying more attention to established names like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells and ignoring the newer authors.

The announcements and reviews were checked on two levels: (1.) How many books from the list were included in the four sources and (2.) what was said about each book—if the reviewer appeared to react negatively or positively towards the book being reviewed. In this way it was hoped to find how strong an influence the reviews would be to a librarian in that time period.

At the same time, a search was made through The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature and Library Literature of that time period to discover what librarians were actually saying about science fiction. Articles appearing in journals other than those for the library profession were studied to see if any references were made about libraries in such a way as to indicate that the author was connected with the library profession.

IV. KNOTTED STRING

From the results of Table I, syndrome sufferers should have little to complain about. With a total of 57 books published between 1920 and 1949 that Anatomy of Wonder considered important for a core collection, 40 were reported in the sources—approximately 70%. Of the 104 books that Anatomy of Wonder considered less important, 56 (approximately 54%) were reported.

Table 1: General Totals

Year	New Books Published *	New Books Published LI	New Books Listed *	New Books Listed LI	Reprints *	Reprints LI	Other Titles	Total Listed
1920	1	1	1	1	7	2	5	16
1921	1		1		4	1	5	11
1922	1		1		1		5	7
1923	4	2	3	2	3		3	11
1924	4	1	1		4	1	5	11
1925	1	3		2	3	1	4	10
1926	1	1		1	13	4	4	22
1927	1	4	1	2	6		14	23
1928		6		3	7	1	8	19
1929	3	5	2	2	5	4	13	26
1930	2	4	1	3	6	2	9	21
1931	3	2	2	2	13	5	4	26
1932	1	3	1	2	5	3	7	18
1933	2	5	2	3	7		4	16
1934		5		4	7	3	11	26
1935	3	2	2	2	4	2	11	21
1936	2	1	1		10	3	14	28
1937	2	5	1	4	7	1	8	21
1938	1				5	2	5	12
1939	1	2	1	2	9		9	20
1940		1		1	5	2	5	13
1941	4		4		6	2	1	13
1942		2		1	2	5	2	10
1943	1	4	1		4		5	9
1944	1	1			1	1	4	6
1945	1	2			3	3	1	7
1946	4	5	4	3	7	8	3	25
1947	3	13	2	4	10	3	6	25
1948	3	16	3	5	7		16	32
1949	6	8	5	7	6	4	20	42
	57	104	40	56	177	63	211	547
	161		96		240			

Explanation: "New Books Published" are those from Anatomy of Wonder's list published within the time period. "New Books Listed" are those found in the sources. "*" are those books marked in Anatomy of Wonder as necessary for a core collection, while "LI" are the relatively less important books. "Total Listed" is obtained by adding the "New Books Listed", "Reprints", and "Other Titles" columns for each year.

Table 2: Reprints by Year of Original Publication

Year	pre1700	1700	1800	1900–1919	1920–25	26–30	31–35	36–40	41–45	46–49
1920		2	2	5						
1921		2	3							
1922			1							
1923		1	1		1					
1924	1	2	1		1					
1925		2	1	1						
1926		1	14	1	1					
1927		2	2			2				
1928		2	5		1					
1929		1	6		1	1				
1930		4	2	1		1				
1931		4	12			2				
1932		2	6							
1933		2	3				2			
1934		1	8				1			
1935	1	1	3				1			
1936		1	5				7			
1937		2	4	1			1			
1938		1	4			1	1			
1939		2	5		1		1			
1940		4					2	1		
1941		1	6					1		
1942			5			2				
1943			1	2						
1944			1						1	
1945		2	1			1	2			
1946		1	11	1			1		1	
1947		3	5	1	1		2		1	
1948		3	2				2			
1949		1	7			1		1	1	
Total	2	50	127	13	7	11	23	3	4	0

Table 2 gives a break-down of reprints by the year of original publication in order to show the historical depth possible if a library had purchased most of the 240 reprints (Table 1) listed in the sources. An additional 211 science fiction books — reprints as well as new

books—that were not included in Anatomy of Wonder's list were also noted as mentioned in the sources (Table 1).

V. ANOTHER'S EYES

The journals studied did not actually start reviewing books until the late 1940's. For most of the period studied, the books in the new book announcements were either listed only by author and title, or annotated enough to place the book as a mystery, romance, etc., but not enough for careful selection.

Sometimes the annotator would give the market as well as a simple description, as Booklist (v.34, December 1, 1937, p.129), did Capek's War with the Newts, adding "Limited in appeal to thoughtful readers." And again in Library Journal (v.60, February 1, 1935, p.171), after a description of Arthur Pier's God's Secret, it was suggested, "Market: Those who enjoy the novels of H. G. Wells." And once again in Library Journal (v.59, February 15, 1934, p.182), Balmer and Wylie's After Worlds Collide was given "Market: All those who read the first book, readers of imaginative scientific adventure stories."

Annotations of new books in Library Journal and Booklist commonly had the annotator's opinion as well as a brief description. Comments normally consisted of only one or two words added to the description; but, as most of the annotators for these journals were librarians, this proved to be one indication of the librarians' attitude toward these books. For example, in Booklist (v.19, April 1923, p.215), the annotator's opinion of Capek's R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots) was "tense,

dramatic, clever." And again in 1925 (Booklist v.21, p.305) while discussing Zamiatin's We, the annotator opened with "A brilliant and amusing satire on standardization."

If it could be assumed that one or two words added to the description could be considered a recommendation, it would still not be as strong an influence in the matter of book buying as would a long review. The source of the annotation must then be taken into account, as the purpose of the annotations differ with the source. Publisher's Weekly has a different goal in reviewing and a somewhat different audience than Booklist. Publisher's Weekly is aimed mainly at book-sellers, who would need to know something about the book in order to promote it. To suit that purpose, the annotations are brief descriptions with few added opinions. On the other hand, Booklist's and Library Journal's annotations are written to help librarians decide which book to buy, while the A.L.A. Catalog tells the librarian which books should be in the collection. For that reason, it could be assumed that one or two words added to the annotations appearing in the three library sources could be considered equal in influence to a long review appearing in a source outside the library profession.

No annotation or review could be found in Booklist condemning any of the listed books. This could be due to the fact that a listing in Booklist is often considered a recommendation in itself.

Although Library Journal is not as highly selective as Booklist, no negative report on a book could be found in LJ, either.

The A.L.A. Catalog gave brief descriptions, with no added opinions, but inclusion in that source was a recommendation in itself.

Tables 3-5 detail the coverage of SF books by the sources and demonstrate the overlapping of the four sources. Syndrome sufferers could point at the low amount of books listed by the three library sources and contrast that with those books listed in Publisher's Weekly. However, this is an unjust comparison, since Publisher's Weekly could list more books because it was (and still is) a weekly journal, unlike Library Journal (then twice a month) or Booklist (then once a month) or the A.L.A. Catalog (normally about a five year cumulation).

VI. WORD FROM THE VOID

Lyn Hart in 1949 commented that, "Until now, the selection of novels for science fiction has caused little difficulty, since it has been a matter of accepting gratefully the few presentable titles which have come on the market."[18] If that was the case, if librarians had purchased most of the books listed in the sources, by the end of 1949 they would have had a science fiction collection with a balanced amount of historical depth and current works. Why, then, have SF people been complaining?

Although the reviewers commented positively about the science fiction titles, during the time period of the study only one article on science fiction appeared in a library journal. Found in the November 1, 1949, issue of Booklist, the article is basically a

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[18]Lyn Hart, "Science Fiction," Booklist 46 (November 1, 1949): 74.

Table 3: Coverage of the field by the sources — New Books

Year	Total New Books Published	Total New Books Listed	PW	Booklist	LJ	ALA
1920	2	2	2		None	
1921	1	1	1	1	until	
1922	1	1	1		1926	
1923	6	5	5	2		
1924	5	1		1		
1925	4	2	1	2		
1926	2	1	1	1		
1927	5	3	3			
1928	6	3	3	1		
1929	8	4	4	1		
1930	6	4	4			
1931	5	4	4	1		
1932	4	3	3		1	
1933	7	5	5	2	1	1
1934	5	4	3		4	
1935	5	4	4	2	2	1
1936	3	1	1		1	
1937	7	5	4	1	2	
1938	1	0				
1939	3	3	1	2	2	
1940	1	1	1	1	1	
1941	4	4	4	1	2	
1942	2	1	1		1	
1943	5	1		1		
1944	2	0				
1945	3	0				
1946	9	7	5	5	1	3
1947	16	6	6	1	1	
1948	19	8	8	2	1	
1949	14	12	12	3	5	2
Total	161	96	87	31	25	8
Percentage of New Books Listed			90%	32%	26%	8%

Table 4: Coverage of the field by the sources — Reprints

Year	Total Reprints Listed	PW	Booklist	LJ	ALA
1920	9	9	3	None	
1921	5	1	2	until	3
1922	1	1		1926	
1923	3	3			
1924	5	4	2		
1925	4	3	2		
1926	17	4	2		13
1927	5	4	3		
1928	8	5	5	1	
1929	9	8	4	1	
1930	8	7	3		
1931	18	17	3		
1932	8	8	4		
1933	7	5	3		
1934	10	10	1		
1935	6	6	1		
1936	13	12	5		
1937	8	8			
1938	7	5	4		
1939	9	8	1		
1940	7	6	2	1	
1941	8	7	2		
1942	7	6	3		
1943	4	4	1	1	1
1944	2	2	1		
1945	6	6			
1946	15	13	3		
1947	13	11	2	3	
1948	8	7	2	2	
1949	10	10			
Total	240	213	64	9	17
Percentage of Reprints Listed		89%	27%	4%	7%

Table 5: Coverage of the field by the sources — Other Titles

Year	Total Listing Other Titles	PW	Booklist	LJ	ALA
1920	4	3	1	None	
1921	5	5		until	
1922	5	5		1926	
1923	3	3			
1924	5	5			
1925	4	4			
1926	4	4			
1927	14	14			
1928	8	8			
1929	13	13			
1930	9	9			
1931	4	4			
1932	7	7			
1933	4	4			
1934	11	9		4	
1935	11	8		6	
1936	15	11	1	5	
1937	8	7	1	3	
1938	5	5		2	
1939	9	8		1	
1940	5	4	1	2	1
1941	1			1	
1942	2	2			
1943	5	5	2	1	1
1944	4	2	1	1	
1945	1	1			
1946	3	3			
1947	6	5			
1948	16	16	1	2	1
1949	20	19			1
Total	211	193	8	28	5

compilation and review of the science fiction books appearing that year. As the only article, it does give an indication of the librarians' attitude toward science fiction at that time.

> "Of course, every library large or small will have some older novels which may be regarded as science fiction and which will be just as pleasing to many readers as the recent product. Some of the works of Jules Verne, H. Rider Haggard, H. G. Wells, Lord Dunsany, A. Conan Doyle, E. R. Eddison, and Karel Capek, along with Huxley's Brave New World and Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four are examples that come readily to mind, although they do not all conform to the strict requirements of ardent science fiction fans. However, in many cases the science fiction addict can be developed into a reader of many kinds of imaginative literature."[19]

Lyn Hart, the author of that statement, picked his writers rather well. All but Lord Dunsany and E. R. Eddison were listed in Anatomy of Wonder, either for the time period of the study, or for pre1920 titles. A syndrome sufferer, however, would wonder just what Hart meant by his last sentence.

Another example of the librarians' attitude of that time was found in a survey of fiction and its readers done in 1936. Only one science fiction author is mentioned, but the attitude toward that one is unmistakable. The writer starts out by mentioning that the survey has "a list of 254 authors, ranging in quality from Edgar Rice Burroughs to Tolstoi."[20]

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[19] Ibid: 75.

[20] Jeannette Howard Foster, "An Approach to Fiction through the Characteristics of Its Readers," Library Quarterly 6 (April 1936): 129.

A strong indication of the idea of "serious" literature was the statement that:

> "Non-library sources supplied most noticeably (1) the newest good fiction (Hervey Allen, Samuel Rogers, James Hilton); (2) the "classics" (George Eliot, Defoe, Dickens); (3) authors who might be considered dubious from the viewpoint of the conservative reader (James Joyce, Tiffany Thayer, Thorne Smith); and the oldest or poorest lighter material not much stocked by libraries (Edgar Rice Burroughs, Elinor Glyn)."[21]

And again, when the author is defining her qualitative scale:

> "At the end of the list one finds the type of wholesale sentimentality, sensationalism, or moralizing which is serialized in newspapers or cheaper magazines and circulated by the poorer drugstore rental libraries —stories in which there is little but plot; in which the experience is distorted, the characters are hardly more than labeled costumes or attitudes, and the writing is careless or full of affection (E. R. Burroughs, et al.)."[22]

To demonstrate how this opinion of Burroughs differs from that in the SF field, Edgar Rice Burroughs has seven books listed in Anatomy of Wonder, and that guide adds that those seven are but a "cross-section of the more than fifty novels making up the canon of Burrough's work."[23] All seven are starred, indicating that all seven conformed to at least one of Anatomy of Wonder's requirements for a core collection title (listed earlier in this report).

Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, in Science Fiction: History—Science—Vision, add the point that:

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[21] Ibid: 133.

[22] Ibid: 141.

[23] Neil Barron, Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976): 55.

> "There is a strong temptation for the critic to write him [Edgar Rice Burroughs] off as a hack who has taken shrewd advantage of a weakness in human nature. But this would be most unwise, for what he represents is a vital part of all fiction and especially of science fiction."[24]

Jeannette Foster's article was the only one found written by a librarian which discussed, however slightly, science fiction and its position in regard to "serious" literature. Two articles by librarians in the 1950's veer from Lyn Hart's "middle-of-the-road" attitude to full SF support.

About 1953, Sister Mary Bennet conducted "an experiment to verify a hunch that the students in high school physics and chemistry classes, especially those going on to college, prefer science fact to science fiction."[25] Since nowhere in the report does she mention the results, it could be assumed that she verified her hunch, despite the fact that she did not seem surprised to report that the students thought that both the fact and fiction books should be included in their library. The Sister's unbiased attitude slipped only once in the entire report, when she referred to Robert Heinlein's Waldo and Magic, Inc. as "unwholesome."[26] However, since Magic, Inc. contains magic, witches, and a confrontation with the Devil, it is understandable that a Sister would react in such a manner.

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[24]Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, Science Fiction: History—Science—Vision (London: Oxford University Press, 1977): 12.

[25]Sister Mary Bennet, "Science Fact or Fiction: Which—and Why?" Catholic Library World 25 (March 1954): 179.

[26]Ibid: 181.

The second article is a history of the "recent" science fiction ("recent" being approximately 1900 to 1952, when the article was published). It was written by Andre Norton, who in 1952 was a children's librarian as well as a science fiction writer. She had a few suggestions for librarians in regard to science fiction.

> "There is a literary standard in this field, and librarians as well as editors, can help to raise it to a high level. Encourage good writing and be interested in the result. Read without prejudice and an open mind. The trite plot, the cardboard characterization, the dull, old fashioned story must not be given to avid readers as the "latest" book. Verne may be a classic but he is now also a museum piece.
>
> "The best advice is-whether you like science-fiction or not-read it before you condemn."[27]

Readily apparent is Norton's disagreement with Hart's advice that "some older novels...will be just as pleasing to many readers as the recent product."[28] Jules Verne does not seem to be as pleasing to Norton as would a more current SF author.

The fact that this is a librarian asking other librarians not to condemn science fiction indicates that there was some bad feeling against SF. But how bad was it? No articles condemning science fiction as a whole could be found, and one would think that an all-out attack on SF or any branch of literature would have had more publicity in library literature.

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[27] Andre Norton, "Living in 1980 Plus-", Library Journal 77 (September 15, 1952): 1464-1466.

[28] Lyn Hart, "Science Fiction," Booklist 46 (November 1, 1949): 74.

VII. FULL CIRCLE

From 1920 to 1949, 96 new and 240 reprinted books from Anatomy of Wonder and 211 other titles were mentioned in the four sources. Of the new books, there were approximately 56 annotations which were more than brief descriptions (Table 3, total of those covered by Booklist and LJ); while of the other titles, approximately 36 (Table 5, total of those covered by Booklist and LJ) were "recommended" in that manner. Adding ALA's implied recommendation, there were 66 annotations of new books (Table 3) in which the librarian's opinion was indicated and 41 of SF titles not listed in Anatomy of Wonder (Table 5). Since no negative annotations could be found, it can then be said that librarians did not react negatively toward the science fiction books being published—they did not condemn them nor did they ignore them.

The only article containing a strong emotion either for or against science fiction was the one by Andre Norton. But, since she is also a science fiction writer, this article cannot be given the emphasis that one written by someone outside the genre would have. However, it does indicate that there was some feeling against SF existing among librarians. Just how strong the feeling was is hard to determine. Both Lyn Hart and Sister Mary Bennet maintain a careful neutrality throughout their articles. The reviews and annotations, while giving a seeming approval to the titles under discussion, are also not overenthusiastic in their praise.

In contrast to the seemingly low amount of interest in the genre among librarians, twelve articles (not written by science fiction authors) could be found in magazines such as Saturday Review of Literature, Harper, New Republic, and Senior Scholastic from 1937 to 1949. Most of these articles are discussions of the new books in the field, as well as of the writers and fans, but the attitude in general is enthusiastic. Even Bernard DeVoto's article, "Doom Beyond Jupiter," from which was taken the literary opinion earlier in this report, does not continue on in that vein and instead seems to approve of the genre by the last paragraph.

Why, then, did librarians reserve opinion on this genre?

Jeannette Foster's article gives the impression that, in 1936, the quality of a literary work was the main concern and if a patron preferred lesser quality, there was something wrong with the patron, not the standard of quality. Even in 1954, almost twenty years later, Sister Mary Bennet was still trying to interest students in nonfiction rather than fiction. Norton's comment that SF "does have a literary standard" serves to make one wonder whether librarians had reason to disapprove of SF. It seems, then, that the "condemnation" mentioned by Andre Norton was the librarians' classification of science fiction as "not serious literature" and, as "not serious literature", beneath their professional notice.

But it also appears as if librarians did not take such a lofty approach in regard to book selection. Gordon Dickson recently dedicated

his book The Time Storm to librarians, explaining that in the 1950's, libraries were the only real market for hardcover SF. "The libraries alone bought science fiction on a regular basis, shelved them, and made them continuously available to readers; and in this way libraries kept both science fiction and those of us who wrote it, alive."[29]

Obviously, despite syndrome sufferers' claims to the contrary, some libraries did include science fiction in their collection. However, with all the bickering back and forth as to who excludes what and what should or should not be in a collection, one major consideration has been overlooked. What matters is not whether the librarian prefers "serious" literature or westerns or romance or SF—that is not important. What is important is that a library fulfills its main reason for existence —to serve its patrons. In the long run, it is the clientale of libraries who determine, by their use of the library, what types of fiction and nonfiction are stocked, what books are kept in or weeded out of a collection, and even whether fiction books are shelved in author/alphabetical order or by subject. The users of a library have the final say.

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[29]Gordon Dickson, Time Storm (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977): dedication. [Thank you, Mr. Dickson]

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